

VIPS Plead for Humanitarian Asylum for Julian Assange

Memorandum for: The US Embassies of Ecuador and the United Kingdom, and the U.S. State Department

From: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Subject: Humanitarian Asylum for Julian Assange

For six years, WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange has been effectively imprisoned without charges at Ecuador's London embassy. In that time, two international courts and dozens of respected legal and human rights organizations have decried actions of the UK, US and Swedish governments that confine the journalist in what now amounts to torturous isolation, deprived of space, sunlight, visitors, communication with the outside and necessary medical care.

The catalyst was an arcane effort by the Swedish government to extradite Assange for questioning about claims of sexual improprieties.¹ The UK government subsequently arrested Assange and released him on bail.² Ecuador granted Assange asylum at its embassy based on concerns he could be extradited to the US where he would not receive a fair trial and could receive a death sentence.³ (Former Obama DOJ spokesperson Matthew Miller has acknowledged that US officials intended to arrest Julian Assange but decided against it because of the expected impacts on press freedom.)⁴

The UK government threatens to arrest Assange if he leaves the embassy for "not surrendering at bail" and refuses to rule out extradition to the US.⁵ Under a new president, Ecuador has cut off Assange's communications with the outside world.

Experts Criticize Treatment of Assange

In June, 2014, The National Lawyers Guild and 59 human rights and legal organizations petitioned the United Nations to act on violations of Assange's "fundamental human rights." In addition, "33 union, human rights, media and civil society organizations" petitioned the Human Rights Commission in Geneva on behalf of freedom for Assange. Reports submitted by the groups identified "numerous systematic deficiencies in Swedish pre-trial procedures like the routine placement of persons who have not been charged with any crime in indefinite, isolated, or unexplained pre-charge detention."⁶

In February 2016, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concluded that Assange's situation constitutes "arbitrary detention" and violates both the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.⁷ Assange's Swedish lawyer, Per Samuelson, told The Guardian, 4 Feb 2016, "If he is regarded as detained, that means he has served his time, so I see no other option for Sweden but to close the case."⁸

Another year would pass, however, before Sweden dropped its investigation, after finally consenting to interview Assange at the embassy.⁹ Recently obtained emails show that Sweden would have dropped the case years earlier but for pressure from UK authorities.¹⁰ In summary, Assange has been confined for six years over allegations that never resulted in charges, much less a criminal conviction.

On July 12, 2018, the Organization of American States' (OAS) Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) sent out a ruling¹¹ that was virtually unnoticed by US news media. The IACHR found "it is the duty of nations to allow for the passage of successful asylum seekers from embassies to the mainland territory of the state that has granted an individual asylum."

For Julian Assange, this would mean that, according to the Court's decision, Britain has a legal obligation to allow Julian Assange to exit the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in peace and allow for his safe transit to an airport from which he would be able to fly to Ecuador, the country that has granted Assange asylum and where he now also holds formal citizenship¹²

"[I]t is imperative," the ruling states, "that Assange is allowed to make the safe passage to Ecuador demanded by the Court as his physical and mental health conditions have been described as deteriorating rapidly. If, nevertheless, UK authorities insist on arresting Assange, "the British government will have wantonly failed to uphold Assange's rights as a legitimate receiver of asylum by Ecuador."¹³

The IACHR ruling suggests further that outright abuses occurred when Ecuador removed security assigned for Assange;¹⁴ when the UK rejected Ecuador's request for safe passage of Assange to Ecuador¹⁵; and when the US obstructed efforts to end Assange's virtual imprisonment.¹⁶

Mistaken Assumptions Underlie Government Policies

President Trump's Attorney General Jeff Sessions hinted at a crackdown on the press.¹⁷ Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Wikileaks a "non-state, hostile intelligence service" that is often "abetted by state actors like Russia."¹⁸ Pompeo laments the "hero worship" of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden and suggests harsh measures would prevent future "leaks" of classified information. But, it is government persecution, not the lack of it, that gives truth-tellers hero status. Also, what truly upsets senior intelligence officials is not (frequently condoned) "leaking" but blowing the whistle on government

wrongdoing.

Harsh measures do not deter individuals with strong moral convictions from whistleblowing. Instead, these motivate potential whistleblowers to find more creative avenues for disclosure. Edward Snowden, for example, was well aware of the US government's brutality toward Thomas Drake, who used "official channels" to express concerns about the legality of NSA surveillance activities. Drake's experience, Snowden says, were his inspiration. "It's fair to say," Snowden said, "if there hadn't been a Thomas Drake, there couldn't have been an Edward Snowden."¹⁹

Similarly, despite the bullying of Julian Assange, new websites have appeared that draw inspiration from WikiLeaks.²⁰ Should the US take custody of Assange and prosecute him like Drake, they could find success elusive in the opinion of Harvard Law professor Jack Goldsmith.

"The most relevant law, the Espionage Act, is famously overbroad and thus an uncertain basis for prosecution," observed Goldsmith. "This is one reason the government has never successfully prosecuted a member of the media for soliciting or publishing classified information. Nor has the government ever successfully prosecuted a non-media organization for solicitation or receipt of classified information."²¹

"Failing in the effort would make the United States look even more ineffectual than it does as a result of the leaks," Goldsmith concluded.

A successful prosecution could have worse consequences. With little that distinguishes Wikileaks' activities from those of mainstream news gatherers²², a dangerous legal precedent would be established. Journalists employed by major newspapers that also published government secrets, including some of the same secrets published by Wikileaks, could be imprisoned by any administration with animosity toward the press. The impacts of prosecuting Assange would ripple around the world as officials in other governments followed the most powerful nation's example. With no means of holding governments accountable, despotism would proliferate, triggering cascading crises and worldwide disruption.

UN human rights expert Alfred de Zayas observes that "Order depends on the consistent and uniform application of international law."²³

Governments could simply ignore the court directives on Assange's asylum rights; but that too carries risks, undermining efforts by those countries to support dissidents of their choosing. Potentially, in the future, the diplomatic privileges of UK, US and Ecuadorian diplomats could also come under assault.

A Fork in the Road

Collectively, the governments of Sweden, the UK, the US, Ecuador (recently) and, through its silence, Assange's home country of Australia have imposed six years of suffering on Assange and possibly life-long damage to his health. With their proxies, they pound Assange with threats, ad hominem attacks and misleading statements. He cannot defend himself because the government of Ecuador terminated his access to communications systems. This may have a temporary effect of confusing the public; but as more legal experts and human rights authorities hazard coming to his defense, the public may recognize these assaults as the desperate flailings of governments that lack credible defenses for their actions.

Public dissatisfaction with governments worldwide is currently high, as evidenced by numerous massive street protests, passages of referendums against centralized power, and wide-spread elections of anti-establishment candidates. Any additional erosion of public support risks a tipping point with unforeseeable consequences. Brutality against Julian Assange, particularly as his health declines, can only increase his stature as a journalist, enshrine his popular global status as a martyr for freedom, and effectively undermine support for his persecutors.

The involved governments have arrived at a fork in the road. They can continue the persecution of Assange, risking catastrophe for diminishing returns. Or, they can let Assange proceed to Ecuador, or home to Australia if it provides suitable guarantees,²⁴ and boost their public standing as self-described supporters of human rights, the rule of law, and a free press.

We the undersigned members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity urge all governments to honor the OHCHR and IACHR directives with respect to Julian Assange and other asylum seekers.

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Journalists Are All Julian Assange

As Ecuador threatens to expel Julian Assange, CN Ed. Joe Lauria will speak in a 50-hr. [online vigil](#) for Assange on Sat., 8pm EDT. In 2010, Bob Parry, late CN founder & editor, wrote this incisive essay on Assange's vital work.

By Robert Parry

Originally published Dec. 16, 2010.



Whatever the unusual aspects of the case, the Obama administration's reported plan to indict WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for conspiring with Army Pvt. Bradley Manning to obtain U.S. secrets strikes at the heart of investigative journalism on national security scandals.

That's because the process for reporters obtaining classified information about crimes of state most often involves a journalist persuading some government official to break the law either by turning over classified documents or at least by talking about the secret information. There is almost always some level of "conspiracy" between reporter and source.

Contrary to what some outsiders might believe, it's actually quite uncommon for sensitive material to simply arrive "over the transom" unsolicited. Indeed, during three decades of reporting on these kinds of stories, I can only recall a few secret documents arriving that way to me.

In most cases, I played some role – either large or small – in locating the classified information or convincing some government official to divulge some secrets. More often than not, I was the instigator of these "conspiracies."

My "co-conspirators" typically were well-meaning government officials who were aware of some wrongdoing committed under the cloak of national security, but they were never eager to put their careers at risk by talking about these offenses. I usually had to persuade them, whether by appealing to their consciences or by constructing some reasonable justification for them to help.

Other times, I was sneaky in liberating some newsworthy classified information from government control. Indeed, in 1995, Consortiumnews.com was started as a way to publish secret and top-secret information that I had discovered in the files of a closed congressional inquiry during the chaotic period between the Republicans winning the 1994 elections and their actual takeover of Congress in early 1995.

In December 1994, I asked for and was granted access to supposedly unclassified records left behind by a task force that had looked into allegations that Ronald Reagan's campaign had sabotaged President Jimmy Carter's hostage negotiations with Iran in 1980.

To my surprise, I discovered that the investigators, apparently in their haste to wrap up their work, had failed to purge the files of all classified material. So, while my "minder" wasn't paying attention to me, I ran some of the classified material through a copier and left with it in a folder. I later wrote articles about these documents and posted some on the Internet.

Such behavior – whether cajoling a nervous government official to expose a secret or exploiting some unauthorized access to classified material – is part of what an investigative journalist does in covering national security abuses. The traditional rule of thumb has been that it's the government's job to hide the secrets and a reporter's job to uncover them.

In the aftermath of significant leaks, the government often tries to convince news executives to spike or water down the stories “for the good of the country.” But it is the news organization's ultimate decision whether to comply or to publish.

Historically, most of these leaks have caused the government some short-term embarrassment (although usually accompanied by exaggerated howls of protests). In the long run, however, the public has been served by knowing about some government abuse. Reforms often follow as they did during the Iran-Contra scandal that I was involved in exposing in the 1980s.

A Nixon Precedent

Yet, in the WikiLeaks case – instead of simply complaining and moving on – the Obama administration appears to be heading in a direction not seen since the Nixon administration sought to block the publication of the Pentagon Papers secret history of the Vietnam War in 1971.

In doing so, the Obama administration, which came to power vowing a new era of openness, is contemplating a novel strategy for criminalizing traditional journalistic practices, while trying to assure major U.S. news outlets that they won't be swept up in the Assange-Manning dragnet.

The New York Times reported on Thursday that federal prosecutors were reviewing the possibility of indicting Assange on conspiracy charges for allegedly encouraging or assisting Manning in extracting “classified military and State Department files from a government computer system.”

The *Times* article by Charlie Savage notes that if prosecutors determine that Assange provided some help in the process, “they believe they could charge him as a conspirator in the leak, not just as a passive recipient of the documents who then published them.

“Among materials prosecutors are studying is an online chat log in which Private Manning is said to claim that he had been directly communicating with Mr. Assange using an encrypted Internet conferencing service as the soldier was downloading government files. Private Manning is also said to have claimed that Mr. Assange gave him access to a dedicated server for uploading some of them to WikiLeaks.

“Adrian Lamo, an ex-hacker in whom Private Manning confided and who eventually turned him in, said Private Manning detailed those interactions in instant-message conversations with him. He said the special server’s purpose was to allow Private Manning’s submissions to ‘be bumped to the top of the queue for review.’ By Mr. Lamo’s account, Private Manning bragged about this ‘as evidence of his status as the high-profile source for WikiLeaks.’”

Though some elements of this suspected Assange-Manning collaboration may be technically unique because of the Internet’s role – and that may be a relief to more traditional news organizations like the *Times*, which has published some of the WikiLeaks documents – the underlying reality is that what WikiLeaks has done is essentially “the same wine” of investigative journalism in “a new bottle” of the Internet.

By shunning WikiLeaks as some deviant journalistic hybrid, mainstream U.S. news outlets may breathe easier now but may find themselves caught up in a new legal precedent that could be applied to them later.

As for the Obama administration, its sudden aggressiveness in divining new “crimes” in the publication of truthful information is especially stunning when contrasted with its “see no evil” approach toward openly acknowledged crimes committed by President George W. Bush and his subordinates, including major offenses such as torture, kidnapping and aggressive war.

Holder’s Move

The possibility of an indictment of Assange no longer seems to me like rampant paranoia. Initially, I didn’t believe that the Obama administration was serious in stretching the law to find ways to prosecute Assange and to shut down WikiLeaks.

But then there was the pressure on WikiLeaks’ vendors such as Amazon.com and PayPal along with threats from prominent U.S. political figures, spouting rhetoric about Assange as a “terrorist” comparable to Osama bin Laden and a worthy target of assassination.

Normally, when people engage in such talk of violence, they are the ones who attract the attention of police and prosecutors. In this case, however, the Obama administration appears to be bowing to those who talk loosely about murdering a truth-teller.

Attorney General Eric Holder announced last week that he has taken “significant” steps in the investigation, a possible reference to what an Assange lawyer said he had learned from Swedish authorities about a secret grand jury meeting in Northern Virginia.

The Times reported, “Justice Department officials have declined to discuss any grand jury activity. But in interviews, people familiar with the case said the department appeared to be attracted to the possibility of prosecuting Mr. Assange as a co-conspirator to the leaking because it is under intense pressure to make an example of him as a deterrent to further mass leaking of electronic documents over the Internet.

“By bringing a case against Mr. Assange as a conspirator to Private Manning’s leak, the government would not have to confront awkward questions about why it is not also prosecuting traditional news organizations or investigative journalists who also disclose information the government says should be kept secret – including *The New York Times*, which also published some documents originally obtained by WikiLeaks.”

In other words, the Obama administration appears to be singling out Assange as an outlier in the journalistic community who is already regarded as something of a pariah. In that way, mainstream media personalities can be invited to join in his persecution without thinking that they might be next.

Though American journalists may understandably want to find some protective cover by pretending that Julian Assange is not like us, the reality is – whether we like it or not – we are all Julian Assange.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews in 1995.

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GOP and Corporate Dems Gain When Democrats Run Against Putin

Hammering on Russia is a losing strategy for progressives as most Americans care about economic issues and it is the Republicans and corporate Democrats who stand to gain, argues Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon



Progressives should figure it out. Amplifying the anti-Russia din helps to drown out the left's core messages for economic fairness, equal rights, environmental protection, diplomacy and so much more. Echoing the racket of blaming Russia for the USA's severe shortages of democracy plays into the hands of Republicans and corporate Democrats eager to block progressive momentum.

When riding on the "Russiagate" bandwagon, progressives unwittingly aid political forces that are eager to sideline progressive messages. And with the midterm elections now scarcely 100 days away, the torrents of hyperbolic and hypocritical claims about Russia keep diverting attention from why it's so important to defeat Republicans.

As a practical matter, devoting massive amounts of time and resources to focusing on Russia has reduced capacities to effectively challenge the domestic forces that are assaulting democratic possibilities at home – with such tactics as state voter ID laws, purging of voter rolls, and numerous barriers to suppress turnout by people of color.

Instead of keeping eyes on the prize, some of the Democratic base has been watching and trusting media outlets like MSNBC. An extreme Russia obsession at the network has left precious little airtime to expose and challenge the vast quantity of terrible domestic-policy measures being advanced by the Trump administration every day.

Likewise with the U.S. government's militarism. While some Democrats and Republicans in Congress have put forward legislation to end the active U.S. role in Saudi Arabia's mass-murderous war on Yemen, those efforts face a steeper uphill climb because of MSNBC.

This week, under the headline "It's Been Over a Year Since MSNBC Has Mentioned U.S. War in Yemen," journalist Adam Johnson reported for the media watchdog group FAIR about the collapse of journalistic decency at MSNBC, under the weight of the network's Russia Russia Russia obsession. Johnson's article asks a big-type question: "Why is the No. 1 outlet of alleged anti-Trump #resistance completely ignoring his most devastating war?"

The FAIR report says: "What seems most likely is MSNBC has found that attacking Russia from the right on matters of foreign policy is the most elegant way to preserve its 'progressive' image while still serving traditional centers of power – namely, the Democratic Party establishment, corporate sponsors, and their own revolving door of ex-spook and military contractor-funded talking heads."

Russia Doesn't Concern Americans

Corporate media have been exerting enormous pressure on Democratic officeholders and candidates to follow a thin blue party line on Russia. Yet polling shows that few Americans see Russia as a threat to their well-being; they're far more concerned about such matters as healthcare, education, housing and overall economic security.

The gap between most Americans and media elites is clear in a nationwide poll taken after the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki, which was fiercely condemned by the punditocracy. As *The Hill* newspaper reported this week under the headline "Most Americans Back Trump's Call for Follow-Up Summit With Putin," 54 percent of respondents favored plans for a second summit. "The survey also found that 61 percent of Americans say better relations with Russia are in the best interest of the United States."

Yet most Democratic Party leaders have very different priorities. After investing so much political capital in portraying Putin's government as an implacable enemy of the United States, top Democrats on Capitol Hill are hardly inclined to help thaw relations between the world's two nuclear superpowers.

It would be easy for news watchers to see that the Democratic Party is much more committed to a hard line against Russia than a hard line against the corporate forces imposing extreme economic inequality here at home.

National polling underscores just how out of whack and out of touch the party's top dogs are. Last month, the Gallup organization asked: "What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?" The results were telling. "Situation with Russia" came in at below one-half of 1 percent.

The day after the Helsinki summit, *The Washington Post* reported: "Citing polls and focus groups that have put Trump and Russia far down the list of voter priorities, Democratic strategists have counseled candidates and party leaders for months to discuss 'kitchen table' issues. Now, after a remarkable 46-minute news conference on foreign soil where Trump stood side by side with a former KGB agent to praise his 'strong' denials of election interference and criticize the FBI, those strategists believe the ground may have shifted."

Prominent corporate Democrats who want to beat back the current progressive groundswell inside their party are leading the charge. Jim Kessler, a senior vice president at the "centrist" Third Way organization, was quick to proclaim after the summit: "It got simple real fast. I've talked to a lot of Democrats that are running in purple and red states and districts who have said that Russia rarely comes up back home, and I think that has now changed."

The Democratic National Committee and other official arms of the party keep sending out Russia-bashing emails to millions of people on a nearly daily basis. At times the goals seem to involve generating and exploiting manic panic.

At the end of last week, as soon as the White House announced plans (later postponed) for Vladimir Putin to meet with President Trump in Washington this fall, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fired off a mass email – from “RUSSIA ALERT (via DCCC)” – declaring that the Russian president “must NOT be allowed to set foot in our country.” The email strained to conflate a summit with Russian interference in U.S. elections. “We cannot overstate how dangerous this is,” the DCCC gravely warned. And: “We need to stop him at all costs.”

For Democrats who move in elite circles, running against Putin might seem like a smart election move. But for voters worried about economic insecurity and many other social ills, a political party obsessed with Russia is likely to seem aloof and irrelevant to their lives.

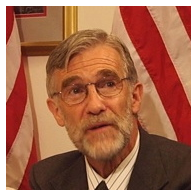
Norman Solomon is the national coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.”

The Gray Lady Thinks Twice About Assange’s Prosecution

Though *The New York Times* itself has not reported it, it’s No. 2 lawyer told a group of judges that the prosecution of Julian Assange could have dire consequences for the *Times* itself, explains Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



Well, lordy be. A lawyer for *The New York Times* has figured out that prosecuting WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange might gore the ox of The Gray Lady herself.

The *Times*’s deputy general counsel, David McCraw, told a group of judges on the West Coast on Tuesday that such prosecution would be a gut punch to free speech, according to Maria Dinzeo, [writing](#) for the *Courthouse News Service*.

Curiously, as of this writing, McCraw's words have found no mention in the *Times* itself. In recent years, the newspaper has shown a marked proclivity to avoid printing anything that might risk its front row seat at the government trough.

Stating the obvious, McCraw noted that the "prosecution of him [Assange] would be a very, very bad precedent for publishers ... he's sort of in a classic publisher's position and I think the law would have a very hard time drawing a distinction between *The New York Times* and WikiLeaks."

That's because, for one thing, the *Times* itself published many stories based on classified information revealed by WikiLeaks and other sources. The paper decisively turned against Assange once WikiLeaks published the DNC and Podesta emails.

More broadly, no journalist in America since John Peter Zenger in Colonial days has been indicted or imprisoned for their work. Unless American prosecutors could prove that Assange personally took part in the theft of classified material or someone's emails, rather than just receiving and publishing them, prosecuting him merely for his publications would be a first since the British Governor General of New York, William Cosby, imprisoned Zenger in 1734 for ten months for printing articles critical of Cosby. Zenger was acquitted by a jury because what he had printed was proven to be factual—a claim WikiLeaks can also make.

McCraw went on to emphasize that, "Assange should be afforded the same protections as a traditional journalist." The *Times* lawyer avoided criticizing what the United Nations has branded – twice – the "arbitrary detention" of Assange and his incommunicado, solitary confinement-like situation in the Ecuador embassy in London since March. Multiple reports indicate the new government of Ecuador will evict Assange into the hands of British police.

These days we need to be thankful for small favors. It's nice to know the *Times* now considers Assange a journalist, even though it did not spring to his defense when he was being widely branded a "high-tech terrorist" – as can be seen here in my very last appearance on CNN's domestic broadcast almost eight years ago.

Mike Pompeo, when he was CIA director, called WikiLeaks a "non-state, hostile intelligence service," and Assange's lawyers believe there is already a sealed indictment against him in the state of Virginia. Assange fears that if he is arrested on flimsy bail skipping charges he will be extradited to the United States.

Is the Fourth Estate Dead?

Ten years ago I contended that The Gray Lady – like the rest of the Fourth Estate – was moribund. More recently, I have been saying it is dead. I now stand corrected. Rumors of its death have been exaggerated. But how does one characterize its current state?

Let me borrow a memorable phrase from philosopher Billy Crystal, playing Miracle Max in “The Princess Bride,” while trying to bring the character Wesley back to life. He is just “mostly dead,” Chrystal insisted.

And so it is with today’s corporate media, with a tiny chance, now that *The New York Times*, watching out for its own equities, might help Assange avoid prosecution for practicing journalism. Actually, he has been accused so far of no crime of any kind.

Eight years ago, when the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity gave Assange its annual award, the Fourth Estate was a bit more than just a distant memory. So we attempted to put his award in historical perspective. Below is the text of the citation presented to Assange, together with the traditional SAAI corner-brightener candlestick holder, by former UK Ambassador Craig Murray (himself an SAAI laureate) and Daniel Ellsberg.

Sam Adams Associates Award

Julian Assange



It seems altogether fitting and proper that this year’s award be presented in London, where Edmund Burke coined the expression “Fourth

Estate.” Comparing the function of the press to that of the three Houses then in Parliament, Burke said:

“...but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sits a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.”

The year was 1787—the year the U.S. Constitution was adopted. The First Amendment, approved four years later, aimed at ensuring that the press would be free of government interference. That was then.

With the Fourth Estate now on life support, there is a high premium on the fledgling Fifth Estate, which uses the ether and is not susceptible of government or corporation control. Small wonder that governments with lots to hide feel very threatened.

It has been said: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” WikiLeaks is helping make that possible by publishing documents that do not lie.

Last spring, when we chose WikiLeaks and Julian Assange for this award, Julian said he would accept only “on behalf of our sources, without which WikiLeaks’ contributions are of no significance.”

We do not know if Pvt. Bradley Manning gave WikiLeaks the gun-barrel video of July 12, 2007 called “Collateral Murder.” Whoever did provide that graphic footage, showing the brutality of the celebrated “surge” in Iraq, was certainly far more a patriot than the “mainstream” journalist embedded in that same Army unit. He suppressed what happened in Baghdad that day, dismissed it as simply “one bad day in a surge that was filled with such days,” and then had the temerity to lavish praise on the unit in a book he called “The Good Soldiers.”

Julian is right to emphasize that the world is deeply indebted to patriotic truth-tellers like the sources who provided the gun-barrel footage and the many documents on Afghanistan and Iraq to WikiLeaks. We hope to have a chance to honor them in person in the future.

Today we honor WikiLeaks, and one of its leaders, Julian Assange, for their ingenuity in creating a new highway by which important documentary evidence can make its way, quickly and confidentially, through the ether and into our in-boxes. Long live the Fifth Estate!

Presented this 23rd day of October 2010 in London, England by admirers of the example set by former CIA analyst, Sam Adams

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years. He is co-founder of Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence.

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The ‘White Helmets’ Controversy

FROM THE ARCHIVES: As Israel in the past few days helped evacuate 800 “White Helmets” from Syria, en route to Britain and other Western countries, we look back at an article published by Consortium News in Oct. 2016.

By Rick Sterling



Across the mainstream Western media, the “White Helmets” are hailed as heroic first responders rescuing injured civilians in rebel-controlled parts of Syria. The U.K. Guardian and The Independent urged the Nobel Committee to award this year’s Nobel Peace Prize to the “White Helmets.” As it turned out, they didn’t get that one, but they did receive the prestigious [2016 “Right Livelihood Award.”](#)

On the U.S. side of the Atlantic, the “White Helmets” are treated with similar uncritical acclaim. They were the subject of the Oct. 17 TIME magazine [cover story](#). Netflix has released a special “documentary” [movie](#) about them. (It later won the 2017 Academy Award for Best Documentary.) New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof has gushed over them for years, helping the group’s one-sided depiction of events inside Syria shape the pro-rebel narrative that is pretty much all the American and European publics hear about Syria.

And, this love-fest is not just confined to establishment media. DemocracyNow! ran a [puff piece](#) interview with the White Helmet infomercial directors. The Intercept published an [uncritical promotion](#) of the “White Helmets” and the group’s controversial leader. [Codepink](#) recommended the Netflix movie (though after receiving criticism about the endorsement, the anti-war group removed it).

Yet, despite the favorable “group think” regarding the “White Helmets” – and more broadly about the rebel cause in Syria – there is another side to the story, including the fact that the “White Helmets” are not just some well-meaning Syrians who emerged to help all civilians suffering from the five years of war.

Not only do they only operate in rebel-controlled areas but they are a source of propaganda about the war, indeed their very existence is an element in the

larger propaganda campaign to rally international support for a “regime change” war in Syria. The “White Helmets” brand was conceived and directed by a New York-based marketing company named “The Syria Campaign,” which itself was “incubated” by a larger politically oriented marketing company called Purpose.

Along with managing the online and social media promotion of the White Helmets, the Syria Campaign has parallel efforts in support of “regime change” in Syria. One of these efforts has been to criticize United Nations and humanitarian relief organizations that supply aid to displaced persons living in areas protected by the Syrian government.

“The allegations made by the Syria Campaign and others were written by people who know nothing about the UN and how it must work,” according to an NGO worker operating in Damascus.

Exaggerated Claims

Claims that the “White Helmets” have saved 65,000 people also appear to be wildly exaggerated. The areas, served by the White Helmets and controlled by Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front and its rebel allies, have few civilians living in them. A medical doctor visiting east Aleppo two years ago described it as a “ghost town,” yet Western media reports cite a highly inflated estimated population of 250,000.

Perhaps unintentionally, the “White Helmets” and one of their video teams confirmed this reality in producing a “cat video” when cat videos were all the rage on social media. In an apparent bid to bring cat lovers onto the side of “regime change” in Syria, the White Helmets’ video showed White Helmet members playing with stray cats in empty neighborhoods, saying: “The homeowners abandoned this district and its kittens.”

Besides promoting themselves as a humanitarian group, the White Helmets have become essential to the propaganda war by gaining – along with similar pro-rebel “activists” – a virtual monopoly on information from rebel-controlled areas, supplying a steady stream of heart-rending stories and images about suffering children to a credulous Western media wanting to believe everything bad about the Syrian government.

One of the reasons why the “White Helmets” have been so successful in inserting their propaganda into Western media is that most of the rebel zones of Syria, especially east Aleppo, have been off limits to Western journalists and other outside observers for years. Two of the last Western reporters to venture into rebel territory, James Foley and Stephen Sotloff, were subsequently beheaded by the Islamic State.

So, as the Syrian government and its allies finally try to expel Al Qaeda terrorists and their cohorts from east Aleppo, the White Helmets have become a major source for the Western news media which treats these “relief workers” as credible providers of on-the-ground information.

Thus, the positive image of the White Helmets and the group’s skillful use of social media deflect attention from the sectarian, violent and unpopular nature of Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front (recently renamed the Syria Conquest Front) and other armed opposition groups while hyping accusations that Syrian and Russian attacks are primarily hitting civilians.

In other words, the White Helmets have gone from being talked about to being the ones doing the talking. News stories increasingly use White Helmet witnesses as their sources, often in ways that promote the self-serving myth of White Helmet heroism. One day, CNN announced that a White Helmet aid center had been hit. Another day, TIME magazine claimed that White Helmet workers were being “hunted”.

‘Eyewitness’ Accounts

Reports from the White Helmets also have served as “eyewitness” accounts about the Syrian military using “barrel bombs,” including in an attack to destroy a Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian convoy and warehouse on Sept. 19 in Orem al Kubra. But there were reasons to be suspicious of this claim since this town is controlled by the infamous Nour al Din al Zinki terrorist group, which recently filmed itself beheading a Palestinian Syrian boy.

It was also illogical that Syrian or Russian planes would attack a SARC convoy, which they could have stopped when it was in government held territory. Plus, the Syrian government works with SARC. And, the ones to “benefit” from the attack were the rebels and their Western backers who cited this atrocity as another reason for “regime change” and to condemn the Russians for assisting the Syrian government. The attack also took attention away from the U.S. airstrike that killed some 70 Syrian soldiers on Sept. 17.

After the convoy was struck, the Russian and Syrian governments called for an independent investigation of the attack site but this has not been done, presumably because the terrorists controlling the area have not allowed it. Nevertheless, the narrative supplied by the White Helmets and other pro-rebel factions – blaming the Syrian government and their Russian allies – has dominated the Western media’s handling of the story.

The “White Helmets” also played a dubious role in allegations that the Syrian government was using chlorine gas in 2013 and 2014 by warning residents before

the attacks to expect the Syrian military to drop chlorine bombs, although it was unclear how the activist first-responders would know that fact in advance. In one of the cases, seven witnesses told U.N. investigators that the rebels had staged the chlorine-gas attack, which could suggest that the “White Helmets” were in on the scam.

So, are the White Helmets heroes or a politically motivated hoax? The time to investigate is now, since it does little good to uncover the lies and manipulations years later, as has happened with the Iraqi and Libyan “regime change” invasions.

A Dangerous Replay

Evidence now suggests that we are seeing a replay of Curveball and the Iraqi WMD in 2003 and the bogus hysteria about stopping a Libyan “genocide” in 2011, both debunked by later investigations but too late to spare those countries from massive death and destruction.

The belated recognition by some Americans that they are being “had” again in Syria has led to some pushback against the mainstream media’s promotion of the “White Helmets” and other pro-rebel activists. In April 2015, Dissidentvoice published an expose of the group’s creation and purpose. Since then there have been other articles and videos revealing the reality behind the “feel good” veneer.

Vanessa Beeley has produced a number of articles about the fraudulent pretense that the “White Helmets” are Syrian Civil Defense, including documentation about the real Syrian Civil Defense, which was founded six decades ago. She initiated an online Change.org petition to NOT give the Nobel Peace Prize to the “White Helmets,” an initiative that must have upset some influential people because Change.org removed the petition without explanation. (You can read the text of the petition here.)

The real Syrian Civil Defense works on a shoestring budget with real volunteers without video teams accompanying and promoting them. Most in the West are unaware the real Syrian Civil Defense even exist. The situation is similar for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which is a genuinely neutral and independent relief organization and has a good website.

Another online petition, also at Change.org, which is still up and running, calls on the Right Livelihood Foundation to rescind its award to the “White Helmets.” The petition includes a number of reasons why the group does not deserve the prize and are not what they are presented to be: they stole the name Syria Civil Defense from the real Syrian organization; they appropriated the

name “White Helmets” from the Argentinian rescue organization Cascos Blancos/White Helmets; they are not independent; they are funded by governments; they are not apolitical; they actively campaign for a “no-fly zone” (which even Hillary Clinton has acknowledged would “kill a lot of Syrians” although she continues to promote the idea); they do not work across Syria; they only work in areas controlled by the armed opposition, mostly under the command of Al Qaeda’s affiliate Nusra Front; they are not unarmed; they sometimes do carry weapons and they also celebrate terrorist victories; they assist in terrorist executions.

Max Blumenthal wrote a two-part exposé at *Alternet*: “How the White Helmets became International Heroes while Pushing US Intervention and Regime Change in Syria” and “Inside the Shadowy PR Firm that’s Lobbying for Regime Change in Syria.”

(Blumenthal shows how the White Helmets are funded with millions of dollars from the British Foreign Office and \$23 million from USAID.) Former weapons inspector Scott Ritter, who was one of the few voices daring to contest President George W. Bush’s false claims about Iraq’s WMD, wrote an article which challenged the White Helmets’ “lionization.”

Internationally, the Israeli TV station I24 ran a special report with the title “White Helmets: Heroes or Hoax?” – giving equal coverage to supporters and critics. Even “The National” out of United Arab Emirates has documented the controversy around the White Helmets.

Not surprisingly, this dissent to the mainstream media’s love affair with the White Helmets drew return fire. The British military contractor who initially set up the group accused critics of being “proxies” for the Syrian and Russian governments (much as Ritter and other skeptics about the Iraqi WMD “group think” were called “Saddam apologists” in 2003).

The controversy also has done little to chasten the Western press corps from relying on the “White Helmets” as the go-to sources for information in Syria’s conflict zones.

Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist and member of Syria Solidarity Movement.

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Guardians of the Magnitsky Myth

FROM THE ARCHIVES: In pursuit of Russia-gate, U.S. mainstream media embraces any attack on Russia and works to ensure Americans don't hear the other side of the story, as with the Magnitsky myth, reported Robert Parry on Oct. 28, 2017.

By Robert Parry

Special to Consortium News



As Russia-gate becomes the go-to excuse to marginalize and suppress independent and dissident media in the United States, a warning of what the future holds is the blacklisting of a documentary that debunks the so-called Magnitsky case.

The emerging outlines of the broader suppression are now apparent in moves by major technology companies – under intense political pressure – to unleash algorithms that will hunt down what major media outlets and mainstream “fact-checkers” (with their own checkered histories of getting facts wrong) deem to be “false” and then stigmatize that information with pop-up “warnings” or simply make finding it difficult for readers using major search engines.

For those who believe in a meaningful democracy, those tactics may be troubling enough, but the Magnitsky case, an opening shot in the New Cold War with Russia, has demonstrated how aggressively the Western powers-that-be behave toward even well-reported investigative projects that unearth inconvenient truth.

Throughout the U.S. and Europe, there has been determined effort to prevent the American and European publics from seeing this detailed documentary that dissects the fraudulent claims at the heart of the Magnitsky story.

The documentary – “The Magnitsky Act: Behind the Scenes” – was produced by filmmaker Andrei Nekrasov, who is known as a fierce critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin but who in this instance found the West’s widely accepted, anti-Russian Magnitsky storyline to be a lie.

However, instead of welcoming Nekrasov’s discoveries as an important part of the debate over the West’s policies toward Russia, the European Parliament pulled the plug on a premiere in Brussels and – except for a one-time showing at the Newseum in Washington – very few Americans have been allowed to see the documentary.

Instead, we’re fed a steady diet of the frothy myth whipped up by hedge-fund investor William

Browder and sold to the U.S. and European governments as the basis for sanctioning Russian officials. For years now, Browder has been given a free hand to spin his dog-ate-my-homework explanation about how some of his firms got involved in a \$230 million tax fraud in Russia.

Browder insists that some “corrupt” Russian police officers stole his companies’ corporate seals and masterminded a convoluted conspiracy. But why anyone would trust a hedge-fund operator who got rich exploiting Russia’s loose business standards is hard to comprehend.

The answer is that Browder has used his money and political influence to scare off and silence anyone who dares point to the glaring contradictions and logical gaps in his elaborate confection.

So, the hedge-fund guy who renounced his U.S. citizenship in favor of a British passport gets the royal treatment whenever he runs to Congress. His narrative just fits so neatly into the demonization of Russia and the frenzy over stopping “Russian propaganda and disinformation” by whatever means necessary.

This summer, Browder testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee and argued that people involved in arranging the one-time showing of Nekrasov’s documentary should be prosecuted for violating the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA), which carries a five-year prison term.

Meanwhile, the U.S. mainstream media helps reinforce Browder’s dubious tale by smearing anyone who dares question it as a “Moscow stooge” or a “useful idiot.”

Magnitsky and Russia-gate

The Magnitsky controversy now has merged with the Russia-gate affair because Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who traveled to America to challenge Browder’s account, arranged a meeting with Donald Trump Jr. and other Trump campaign advisers in June 2016 to present this other side of the story.

Though nothing apparently came from that meeting, *The New York Times*, which always treats Browder’s account as flat fact, led its Saturday edition with a breathless story entitled, “A Kremlin Link to a Memo Taken to Trump Tower,” citing similarities between Veselnitskaya’s memo on the Magnitsky case and an account prepared by “one of Russia’s most powerful officials, the prosecutor general Yuri Y. Chaika.” Cue the spooky music as the *Times* challenges Veselnitskaya’s honesty.

Yet, the *Times* article bows to Browder as the ultimate truth-teller, including repetition of his assertion that Sergei Magnitsky was a whistleblowing “tax lawyer,” rather than one of Browder’s accountants implicated in the tax fraud.

While Magnitsky's profession may seem like a small detail, it gets to the heart of the mainstream media's acceptance of Browder's depiction of Magnitsky – as a crusading lawyer who died of medical neglect in a Russian prison – despite overwhelming evidence that Magnitsky was really a clever accountant caught up in the scheme.

The “lawyer” falsehood – so eagerly swallowed by the *Times* and other mainstream outlets – also bears on Browder's overall credibility: If he is lying about Magnitsky's profession, why should anyone believe his other self-serving claims?

As investigative reporter Lucy Komisar noted in [a recent article](#) on the case, Browder offered a different description when he testified under oath in a New York court deposition in a related federal civil case.

In that adversarial setting, when Browder was asked if Magnitsky had a law degree, Browder said, “I'm not aware that he did.” When asked if Magnitsky had gone to law school, Browder answered: “No.”

Yet, the *Times* and the rest of the mainstream media accept that Magnitsky was a “lawyer,” all the better to mislead the American public regarding his alleged role as a whistleblower.

The rest of Browder's story stretches credulity even more as he offers a convoluted explanation of how he wasn't responsible for bogus claims made by his companies to fraudulently sneak away with \$230 million in refunded taxes.

Rather than show any skepticism toward this smarmy hedge-fund operator and his claims of victimhood, the U.S. Congress and mainstream media just take him at his word because, of course, his story fits the ever-present “Russia bad” narrative.

Plus, these influential people have repeated the falsehoods so often and suppressed contrary evidence with such arrogance that they apparently feel that they get to define reality, which – in many ways – is what they want to do in the future by exploiting the Russia-gate hysteria to restore their undisputed role as the “gatekeepers” on “approved” information.

Which is why Americans and Europeans should demand the right to see the Nekrasov documentary and make their own judgments, possibly with Browder given a chance after the show to rebut the overwhelming evidence of his deceptions.

Instead, Browder has used his wealth and connections to make sure that almost no one gets to see the deconstruction of his fable. And *The New York Times* is okay with that.

[For details on the Nekrasov documentary, see Consortiumnews.com's "[A Blacklisted Film and the New Cold War.](#)"]

The late investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his last book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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US Media is Losing Its Mind Over Trump-Putin Summit

The media's mania over Trump's Helsinki performance and the so-called Russia-gate scandal reached new depths on Monday, says Joe Lauria

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News



The reaction of the U.S. establishment media and several political leaders to President Donald Trump's press conference after his summit meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday has been stunning.

Writing in *The Atlantic*, James Fallows [said](#):

"There are exactly two possible explanations for the shameful performance the world witnessed on Monday, from a serving American president.

Either Donald Trump is flat-out an agent of Russian interests—maybe witting, maybe unwitting, from fear of blackmail, in hope of future deals, out of manly respect for Vladimir Putin, out of gratitude for Russia's help during the election, out of pathetic inability to see beyond his 306 electoral votes. Whatever the exact mixture of motives might be, it doesn't really matter.

Or he is so profoundly ignorant, insecure, and narcissistic that he did not realize that, at every step, he was advancing the line that Putin hoped he would advance, and the line that the American intelligence, defense, and law-enforcement agencies most dreaded.

Conscious tool. Useful idiot. Those are the choices, though both are possibly

true, so that the main question is the proportions ... never before have I seen an American president consistently, repeatedly, publicly, and shockingly advance the interests of another country over those of his own government and people.”

As soon as the press conference ended CNN cut to its panel with these words from TV personality Anderson Cooper: “You have been watching perhaps one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president at a summit in front of a Russian leader, surely, that I’ve ever seen.”

David Gergen, who for years has gotten away with portraying himself on TV as an impartial political sage, then told CNN viewers:

“I’ve never heard an American President talk that way but I think it is especially true that when he’s with someone like Putin, who is a thug, a world-class thug, that he sides with him again and again against his own country’s interests of his own institutions that he runs, that he’s in charge of the federal government, he’s in charge of these intelligence agencies, and he basically dismisses them and retreats into this, we’ve heard it before, but on the international stage to talk about Hillary Clinton’s computer server ...”

“It’s embarrassing,” interjected Cooper.

“It’s embarrassing,” agreed Gergen.

White House correspondent Jim Acosta, ostensibly an objective reporter, then gave his opinion: “I think that sums it up nicely. This is the president of the United States essentially taking the word of the Russian president...over his own intelligence community. It was astonishing, just astonishing to be in the room with the U.S. president and the Russian president on this critical question of election interference, and to retreat back to these talking points about DNC servers and Hillary Clinton’s emails when he had a chance right there in front of the world to tell Vladimir Putin to stay the HELL out of American democracy, and he didn’t do it.”

In other words Trump should just shut up and not question a questionable indictment, which Acosta, like nearly all the media, treat as a conviction.

The Media’s Handlers

The media’s handlers were even worse than their assets. Former CIA director John Brennan tweeted: “Donald Trump’s press conference performance in Helsinki rises to & exceeds the threshold of ‘high crimes & misdemeanors,.’ It was nothing short of treasonous. Not only were Trump’s comments imbecilic, he is wholly in

the pocket of Putin. Republican Patriots: Where are you???"

Here's where the Republican Patriots are, Brennan: "That's how a press conference sounds when an Asset stands next to his Handler," former RNC Chairman Michael Steele tweeted.

Representative Liz Cheney, the daughter of the former vice president, said on Twitter: "As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am deeply troubled by President Trump's defense of Putin against the intelligence agencies of the U.S. & his suggestion of moral equivalence between the U.S. and Russia. Russia poses a grave threat to our national security."

All these were reactions to Trump expressing skepticism about the U.S. indictment on Friday of 12 Russian intelligence agents for allegedly interfering in the 2016 U.S. presidential election while he was standing next to Russian President Vladimir Putin at the press conference following their summit meeting in Helsinki.

"I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be" Russia, Trump said. "I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today."

The indictments, which are only unproven accusations, formally accused 12 members of the GRU, Russian military intelligence, of stealing Democratic Party emails in a hacking operation and giving the materials to WikiLeaks to publish in order to damage the candidacy of Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton. The indictments were announced on Friday, three days before the summit, with the clear intention of getting Trump to cancel it. He ignored cries from the media and Congress to do so.

Over the weekend Michael Smerconish on CNN actually said the indictments proved that Russia had committed a "terrorist attack" against the United States. This is in line with many pundits who are comparing this indictment, that will most likely never produce any evidence, to 9/11 and Pearl Harbor. The danger inherent in that thinking is clear.

Putin said the allegations are "utter nonsense, just like [Trump] recently mentioned." He added: "The final conclusion in this kind of dispute can only be delivered by a trial, by the court. Not by the executive, by the law enforcement." He could have added not by the media.

Trump reasonably questioned why the FBI never examined the computer servers of the Democratic National Committee to see whether there was a hack and who may have done it. Instead a private company, CrowdStrike, hired by the Democratic Party studied the server and within a day blamed Russia on very dubious grounds.

“Why haven’t they taken the server?” Trump asked. “Why was the FBI told to leave the office of the Democratic National Committee? I’ve been wondering that. I’ve been asking that for months and months and I’ve been tweeting it out and calling it out on social media. Where is the server? I want to know, where is the server and what is the server saying?”

But being a poor communicator, Trump then mentioned Clinton’s missing emails, allowing the media to conflate the two different servers, and be easily dismissed as Gergen did.

At the press conference, Putin offered to allow American investigators from the team of special counsel Robert Mueller, who put the indictment together, to travel to Russia and take part in interviews with the 12 accused Russian agents. He also offered to set up a joint cyber-security group to examine the evidence and asked that in return Russia be allowed to question persons of interest to Moscow in the United States.

“Let’s discuss the specific issues and not use the Russia and U.S. relationship as a loose change for this internal political struggle,” Putin said.

On CNN, Christiane Amanpour called Putin’s clear offer “obfuscation.”

Even if Trump agreed to this reasonable proposal it seems highly unlikely that his Justice Department will go along with it. Examination of whatever evidence they have to back up the indictment is not what the DOJ is after. As I wrote about the indictments in detail on Friday:

“The extremely remote possibility of convictions were not what Mueller was apparently after, but rather the public perception of Russia’s guilt resulting from fevered media coverage of what are after all only accusations, presented as though it is established fact. Once that impression is settled into the public consciousness, Mueller’s mission would appear to be accomplished.”

Still No ‘Collusion’

The indictments did not include any members of Trump’s campaign team for “colluding” with the alleged Russian hacking effort, which has been a core allegation throughout the two years of the so-called Russia-gate scandal. Those allegations are routinely reported in U.S. media as established fact, though there is still no evidence of collusion.

Trump emphasised that point in the press conference. “There was no collusion at all,” he said forcefully. “Everybody knows it.”

On this point corporate media has been more deluded than normal as they clutch

for straws to prove the collusion theory. As one example of many across the media with the same theme, a *New York Times* [story](#) on Friday, headlined, "Trump Invited the Russians to Hack Clinton. Were They Listening?," said Russia may have absurdly responded to Trump's call at 10:30 a.m. on July 27, 2016 to hack Clinton's private email server because it was "on or about" that day that Russia allegedly first made an attempt to hack Clinton's personal emails, according to the indictment, which makes no connection between the two events.

If Russia is indeed guilty of remotely hacking the emails it would have had no evident need of assistance from anyone on the Trump team, let alone a public call from Trump on national TV to commence the operation.

More importantly, as Twitter handle "[Representative Press](#)" pointed out: "Trump's July 27, 2016 call to find the missing 30,000 emails could not be a 'call to hack Clinton's server' because at that point it was *no longer online*. Long before Trump's statement, Clinton had already [turned over](#) her email server to the U.S. Department of Justice." Either the indictment was talking about different servers or it is being intentionally misleading when it says "on or about July 27, 2016, the Conspirators attempted after hours to spearfish for the first time email accounts at a domain hosted by a third party provider and used by Clinton's personal office."

This crucial fact alone, that Clinton had turned over the server in 2015 so that no hack was possible, makes it impossible that Trump's TV call could be seen as collusion. Only a desperate person would see it otherwise.

But there is a simple explanation why establishment journalists are in unison in their dominant Russian narrative: it is career suicide to question it.

As Samuel Johnson said as far back as 1745: "The greatest part of mankind have no other reason for their opinions than that they are in fashion ...since vanity and credulity cooperate in its favour."

Importance of US-Russia Relations

Trump said the unproven allegation of collusion "has had a negative impact upon the relationship of the two largest nuclear powers in the world. We have 90 percent of nuclear power between the two countries. It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous what's going on with the probe."

The American president said the U.S. has been "foolish" not to attempt dialogue with Russia before, to cooperate on a range of issues.

"As president, I cannot make decisions on foreign policy in a futile

effort to appease partisan critics or the media or Democrats who want to do nothing but resist and obstruct,” Trump said. “Constructive dialogue between the United States and Russia forwards the opportunity to open new pathways toward peace and stability in our world. I would rather take a political risk in pursuit of peace than to risk peace in pursuit of politics.”

This main reason for summits between Russian and American leaders was also ignored: to use diplomacy to reduce dangerous tensions. “I really think the world wants to see us get along,” Trump said. “We are the two great nuclear powers. We have 90 percent of the nuclear. And that’s not a good thing, it’s a bad thing.”

Preventing good relations between the two countries appears to be the heart of the matter for U.S. intelligence and their media assets. So Trump was vilified for even trying.

Ignoring the Rest of the Story

Obsessed as they are with the “interference” story, the media virtually ignored the other crucial issues that came up at the summit, such as the Middle East.

Trump sort of thanked Russia for its efforts to defeat ISIS. “When you look at all of the progress that’s been made in certain sections with the eradication of ISIS, about 98 percent, 99 percent there, and other things that have taken place that we have done and that, frankly, Russia has helped us with in certain respects,” he said.

Trump here is falsely taking credit, as he has before, for defeating ISIS with only some “help” from Russia. In Iraq the U.S. led the way against ISIS coordinating the Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. But in the separate war against ISIS in Syria, Russia, the Syrian Arab Army, Kurdish forces, Iranian troops and Hizbullah militias were almost entirely responsible for ISIS’ defeat.

Also on Syria, Trump appeared to endorse what is being reported as a deal between Russia and Israel in which Israel would accept Bashar al-Assad remaining as Syrian president, while Russia would work on Iran to get it to remove its forces away from the northern Golan Heights, which Israel illegally considers its border with Syria.

After a meeting in Moscow last week with Putin, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he accepted Assad remaining in power.

“President Putin also is helping Israel,” Trump said at the press conference. “We both spoke with Bibi Netanyahu. They would like to do certain things with respect to Syria, having to do with the safety of Israel. In that respect, we absolutely would like to work in order to help Israel. Israel will be working with us. So both countries would work jointly.”

Trump also said that the U.S. and Russian militaries were coordinating in Syria, but he did not go as far as saying that they had agreed to fight together there, which has been a longstanding proposal of Putin’s dating back to September 2015, just before Moscow intervened militarily in the country.

“Our militaries have gotten along probably better than our political leaders for years,” Trump said. “Our militaries do get along very well. They do coordinate in Syria and other places.”

Trump said Russia and the U.S. should cooperate in humanitarian assistance in Syria.

“If we can do something to help the people of Syria get back into some form of shelter and on a humanitarian basis...that’s what the word was, a humanitarian basis,” he said. “I think both of us would be very interested in doing that.”

Putin said he had agreed on Sunday with French President Emmanuel Macron on a joint effort with Europe to deliver humanitarian aid. “On our behalf, we will provide military cargo aircraft to deliver humanitarian cargo. Today, I brought up this issue with President Trump. I think there’s plenty of things to look into,” Putin said.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter @unjoe .

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The Media’s Brazen Dishonesty About North Korean Nuclear Violations

In its reporting of supposed North Korean “violations”, the corporate media is once again found to be pushing a political agenda, as Gareth Porter explains.

By Gareth Porter



In late June and early July, NBC News, CNN, and *The Wall Street Journal* published stories that appeared at first glance to shed a lurid light on Donald Trump's flirtation with Kim Jong-un. They contained satellite imagery showing that North Korea was making rapid upgrades to its nuclear weapons complex at Yongbyon and expanding its missile production program just as Trump and Kim were getting chummy at their Singapore summit.

In fact, those media outlets were selling journalistic snake oil. By misrepresenting the diplomatic context of the images they were hyping, the press launched a false narrative around the Trump-Kim summit and the negotiations therein.

The headline of the June 27 NBC News story revealed the network's political agenda on the Trump-Kim negotiations. "If North Korea is denuclearizing," it asked, "why is it expanding a nuclear research center?" The piece warned that North Korea "continues to make improvements to a major nuclear facility, raising questions about President Donald Trump's claim that Kim Jong Un has agreed to disarm, independent experts tell NBC News."

CNN's coverage of the same story was even more sensationalist, declaring that there were "troubling signs" that North Korea was making "improvements" to its nuclear facilities, some of which it said had been carried out *after* the Trump-Kim summit. It pointed to a facility that had produced plutonium in the past and recently undergone an upgrade, despite Kim's alleged promise to Trump to draw down his nuclear arsenal. CNN commentator Max Boot cleverly spelled out the supposed implication: "If you were about to demolish your house, would you be remodeling the kitchen?"

But in their determination to push hardline opposition to the negotiations, these stories either ignored or sought to discredit the careful caveat accompanying the original source on which they were based—the analysis of satellite images published on the website 38 North on June 21. The three analysts who had written that the satellite images "indicated that improvements to the infrastructure at North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center are continuing at a rapid pace" also cautioned that this work "should not be seen as having any relationship to North Korea's pledge to denuclearize."

If the authors' point was not clear enough, Joel Wit, the founder of 38 North, who helped negotiate the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea and then worked on its implementation for several years, explained to NBC News: "What you have is a commitment to denuclearize—we don't have the deal yet, we just have a

general commitment." Wit added that he didn't "find it surprising at all" that work at Yongbyon was continuing.

A Willful Misreading of Images

In a briefing for journalists by telephone on Monday, Wit was even more vigorous in denouncing the stories that had hyped the article on 38 North. "I really disagree with the media narrative," Wit said. "The Singapore summit declaration didn't mean North Korea would stop its activities in the nuclear and missile area right away." He recalled the fact that, during negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviets over arms control, "both sides continued to build weapons until the agreement was completed."

Determined to salvage its political line on the Trump-Kim talks, NBC News turned to Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, who has insisted all along that North Korea won't give up its nuclear weapons. "We have never had a deal," Lewis said. "The North Koreans never offered to give up their nuclear weapons. Never. Not once." Lewis had apparently forgotten that the October 2005 Six Party joint statement included language that the DPRK had "committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons...."

Another witness NBC found to support its view was James Acton, co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who declared, "If [the North Koreans] were serious about unilaterally disarming, of course they would have stopped work at Yongbyon." That was true but misleading, because North Korea has always been unambiguously clear that its offer of denuclearization is conditional on reciprocal steps by the United States.

On July 1, a few days after those stories appeared, the *Wall Street Journal* headlined, "New satellite imagery indicates Pyongyang is pushing ahead with weapons programs even as it pursues dialogue with Washington." The lead paragraph called it a "major expansion of a key missile-manufacturing plant."

But the shock effect of the story itself was hardly seismic. It turns out that the images of a North Korean solid-fuel missile manufacturing facility at Hamhung showed that new buildings had been added beginning in the early spring, after Kim Jong-un had called for more production of solid-fuel rocket engines and warhead tips last August. The construction of the exterior of some buildings was completed "around the time" of the Trump-Kim summit meeting, according to the analysts at the James Martin Center of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies.

So the most Pyongyang could be accused of was going ahead with a previously planned expansion while it was just beginning to hold talks with the United States.

The satellite images were analyzed by Jeffrey Lewis, the director whom had just been quoted by NBC in support of its viewpoint that North Korea had no intention of giving up its nuclear weapons. So it is no surprise that the Martin Center's David Schmerler, who also participated in the analysis of the images, told the *Journal*, "The expansion of production infrastructure for North Korea's solid missile infrastructure probably suggests that Kim Jong Un does not intend to abandon his nuclear and missile programs."

But when this writer spoke with Schmerler last week, he admitted that the evidence of Kim's intentions regarding nuclear and missile programs is much less clear. I asked him if he was sure that North Korea would refuse to give up its ICBM program as part of a broader agreement with the Trump administration. "I'm not sure," Schmerler responded, adding, "They haven't really said they're willing to give up ICBM program." That is true, but they haven't rejected that possibility either—presumably because the answer will depend on what commitments Trump is willing to make to the DPRK.

Distortion is the Norm

These stories of supposed North Korean betrayal by NBC, CNN, and the *Wall Street Journal* are egregious cases of distorting news by pushing a predetermined policy line. But those news outlets, far from being outliers, are merely reflecting the norms of the entire corporate news system.

The stories of how North Korea is now violating an imaginary pledge by Kim to Trump in Singapore are even more outrageous, because big media had previously peddled the opposite line: that Kim at the Singapore Summit made no firm commitment to give up his nuclear weapons and that the "agreement" in Singapore was the weakest of any thus far.

That claim, which blithely ignored the fundamental distinction between a brief summit meeting statement and past formal agreements with North Korea that took months to reach, was a media maneuver of unparalleled brazenness. And big media have since topped that feat of journalistic legerdemain by claiming that North Korea has demonstrated bad faith by failing to halt all nuclear and missile-related activities.

A media complex so determined to discredit negotiations with North Korea and so unfettered by political-diplomatic reality seriously threatens the ability of the United States to deliver on any agreement with Pyongyang. That means

alternative media must make more aggressive efforts to challenge the corporate press's coverage.

This article originally appeared at The American Conservative.

Gareth Porter is an investigative reporter and regular contributor to TAC. He is also the author of Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare. Follow him on Twitter @GarethPorter.

Corporate Media's About-Face on Ukraine's Neo-Nazis

U.S. corporate media spent years dismissing the role of neo-Nazis in Ukraine's 2014 coup but it is suddenly going through a conversion, as Daniel Lazare reports.

By Daniel Lazare

Special to Consortium News



Last month a freelance journalist named Joshua Cohen published an article in *The Washington Post* about the Ukraine's growing neo-Nazi threat. Despite a gratuitous swipe at Russia for allegedly exaggerating the problem (which it hasn't), the piece was fairly accurate.

Entitled "Ukraine's ultra-right militias are challenging the government to a showdown," it said that fascists have gone on a rampage while the ruling clique in Kiev closes its eyes for the most part and prays that the problem somehow goes away on its own.

Thus, a group calling itself C14 (for the fourteen-word ultra-right motto, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children") not only beat up a socialist politician and celebrated Hitler's birthday by stabbing an antiwar activist, but bragged about it on its website. Other ultra-nationalists, Cohen says, have stormed the Lvov and Kiev city councils and "assaulted or disrupted" art exhibits, anti-fascist demos, peace and gay-rights events, and a Victory Day parade commemorating the victory over Hitler in 1945.

Yet nothing has happened to stop this. President Petro Poroshenko could order a crackdown, but hasn't for reasons that should be obvious. The U.S.-backed

“Euromaidan” uprising not only drove out former president Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, who had won an OSCE-certified election, but tore the country in two, precisely because ultra-rightists like C14 were in the lead.

When resistance to the U.S.-backed coup broke out in Crimea and parts of the country’s largely Russian-speaking east, the base of Yanukovich voters, civil war ensued. But because the Ukrainian army had all but collapsed, the new, coup government had no one to rely on other than the neo-fascists who had helped propel it to power.

So an alliance was hatched between pro-western oligarchs at the top – *Forbes* puts Poroshenko’s net worth at a cool \$1 billion – and neo-Nazi enforcers at the bottom. Fascists may not be popular. Indeed, Dmytro Yarosh, the fire-breathing leader of a white-power coalition known as Right Sector, received less than one percent of the vote when he ran for president in May 2014.

But the state is so weak and riddled with so many ultra-rightists in key positions – Andriy Parubiy, founder of the neo-Nazi Social-National Party of Ukraine, is speaker of the parliament, while ultra-rightist Arsen Avakov is minister of the interior – that the path before them is clear and unobstructed. As Cohen points out, the result is government passivity on one hand and a rising tide of ultra-right violence on the other. In the earlier stages of the civil war, for instance, the rightwing extremists burned more than 40 people alive in a labor union building in Odessa, a horrific incident downplayed by Western media.

Confusing its Readers

Cohen’s article may have *Washington Post* readers scratching their heads for the simple reason that the paper has long said the opposite. Since Euromaidan, the *Post* has toed the official Washington line that Vladimir Putin has exaggerated the role of the radical right in order to discredit the anti-Yanukovich revolt and legitimize his own alleged interference.

Sure, anti-Yanukovich forces had festooned the Kiev town hall with a white supremacist banner, a Confederate flag, and a giant image of Stepan Bandera, a Nazi collaborator whose forces killed thousands of Jews during the German occupation and as many as 100,000 Poles. And yes, they staged a 15,000-strong torchlight parade in Bandera’s honor and scrawled an SS symbol on a toppled statue of Lenin. They also destroyed a memorial to Ukrainians who had fought on what Bandera supporters regard as the wrong side of World War II, that is, with the Soviets and against the Axis.

But so-called responsible, mainstream journalists are supposed to avert their

eyes to avoid being tarred as a “useful idiot” whom Putin supposedly employs to advance his “anti-American agenda.” Ten days after Yanukovych’s departure, the *Post* dutifully assured its readers that Russian reports of “hooligans and fascists” had “no basis in reality.”

A week or so later, it said “the new government, though peppered with right-wing politicians, is led primarily by moderate, pro-European politicians.” A few weeks after that, it described Bandera as no more than “controversial” and quoted a Kiev businessman as saying: “The Russians want to call him a fascist, but I feel he was a hero for our country. Putin is using him to try to divide us.”

Thus, the *Post* and other corporate media continued to do its duty by attacking Putin for plainly saying “the forces backing Ukraine’s government in Kiev are fascists and neo-Nazis.” But who was wrong?

The New York Times was no better. It assailed Russia for hurling “harsh epithets” like “neo-Nazi,” and blamed the Russian leader for “scaremongering” by attributing Yanukovych’s ouster to “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and anti-Semites.” *The Guardian*’s Luke Harding – a leading Putin basher – said of the far-right Svoboda Party:

“Over the past decade the party appears to have mellowed, eschewing xenophobia, academic commentators suggest. On Monday, the U.S. ambassador in Kiev, Geoffrey Pyatt, said he had been ‘positively impressed’ by Svoboda’s evolution in opposition and by its behavior in the Rada, Ukraine’s parliament. ‘They have demonstrated their democratic bona fides,’ the ambassador asserted.”

This is the party whose founder, Oleh Tyahnybok, said in a 2004 speech that “a Moscow-Jewish mafia” was running the Ukraine and that Bandera’s followers “fought against the Muscovites, Germans, Jews and other enemies who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state.” Had the leopard really changed its spots, according to Pyatt? Or was it simply a matter of America not giving a damn as long as Svoboda joined the fight to encircle Russia and advance NATO’s drive to the east?

As someone named Marx once observed, “Who you gonna believe, me or your own two eyes?” As far as Ukraine was concerned, the answer for the corporate press came from the U.S. State Department. If Foggy Bottom said that Ukrainian neo-Nazism was a figment of Russia’s imagination, then that’s what it was, regardless of evidence to the contrary.

Someday, historians will look back on Euromaidan Ukraine as one of the looniest periods in western journalism – except, of course, for all the ones that have followed. But if one had to choose the looniest story of all, one that best reflects the abject toadyism of the reporting classes, it would have to be “Why Jews and Ukrainians Have Become Unlikely Allies,” a 1,400-word article that ran on the *Post*-owned *Foreign Policy* website in May 2014. Four years later, it stands as a model of how not to write about an all-important political crisis.

Cohen’s Conversion

The piece begins with the usual hand-wringing about Svoboda and Right Sector and expresses remorse that the latter still venerates the “controversial” Bandera, whose followers “fought on the side of the Nazis from 1944 until the end of World War II.” (Actually, they welcomed the Germans from the start and, despite rocky relations with the Slav-hating Nazis, continued to work with them throughout the occupation.)

But then it gets down to business by asserting that as bad as Ukrainian nationalists may be, Russia is doubly worse. “Despite the substantial presence of right wing nationalists on the Maidan during the revolution,” it says, “many in Ukraine’s Jewish community resent being used by Putin in his propaganda war.” The proof is an open letter signed by 21 Ukrainian Jewish leaders asserting that the real danger was Moscow.

“We know that the political opposition consists of various groups, including some that are nationalistic,” the letter declared. “But even the most marginal of them do not demonstrate anti-Semitism or other forms of xenophobia. And we certainly know that our very few nationalists are well-controlled by civil society and the new Ukrainian government – which is more than can be said for the Russian neo-Nazis, who are encouraged by your security services.”

This was music to Washington’s ears. But if neo-Nazis are free of “anti-Semitism or other forms of xenophobia,” how does one explain the white-power symbols in the Kiev town hall? If nationalists were “very few” in number, why did journalists need to explain them away? If Russian security forces really encouraged neo-Nazis, where were the torchlight parades and portraits of Bandera-like collaborators hanging from public buildings in Moscow?

The article might have noted that Josef Zissels, the Jewish community leader who organized the letter, is a provocative figure who has long maintained close relations with Ukraine’s far right. A self-styled Zhydobanderivets – a word that roughly translates as “Kike follower of Bandera” – he has since infuriated other Jewish leaders by criticizing California Congressman Ro Khanna for sending a letter to the State Department asking that pressure be brought on the

governments of Poland and Ukraine to combat Holocaust revisionism in their countries.

Forty-one Jewish leaders were so angry, in fact, that they sent out a letter of their own thanking Khanna for his efforts, expressing “deep concern at the rise of anti-Semitic incidents and expressions of xenophobia and intolerance, including attacks on Roma communities,” and “strongly proclaim[ing] that Mr. Iosif Zissels and the organization VAAD do not represent the Jews of Ukraine.” A Jewish community leader in Russia was so outraged by the pro-Bandera apologetics of Zissels and a Ukrainian-Jewish oligarch named Igor Kolomoisky that he said he wanted to hang both men “in Dnepropetrovsk in front of the Golden Rose Synagogue until they stop breathing.”

So *Foreign Policy* used a highly dubious source to whitewash Ukraine’s growing neo-Nazi presence and absolve it of anti-Semitism. As crimes against the truth go, this is surely one of the worst. But now that the problem has gotten too big for even the corporate media to ignore, overnight muckrakers like Joshua Cohen are seeing to it that getting away with such offenses will no longer be so easy. Before his abrupt about-face, the author of that misleading *Foreign Policy* piece was Joshua Cohen.

Daniel Lazare is the author of *The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy* (Harcourt Brace, 1996) and other books about American politics. He has written for a wide variety of publications from *The Nation* to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and his articles about the Middle East, terrorism, Eastern Europe, and other topics appear regularly on such websites as *Jacobin* and *The American Conservative*.

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The Berkeley Tribute to Robert Parry

A tribute to Robert Parry, the founder and editor of Consortium News, was held in Berkeley last month. Here is the video of the event and excerpts from the speakers who celebrated Bob’s life.

By Rick Sterling

Event Photos by Bill Hackwell

A celebration and salute to the investigative journalist and publisher Robert

Parry took place on Saturday, May 19 in Berkeley California.

You can watch a video shot by Raj Sahei of the entire event [here](#).

[Robert Parry](#) was born in 1949 and died of pancreatic cancer in January 2018. From 1974 until the early 1990's he worked as investigative journalist for Associated Press, Newsweek magazine and then PBS Frontline. During that time, he played a key role breaking stories on the illegal funding of the Nicaraguan Contras, CIA collusion with drug dealers, and Ronald Reagan election team negotiating with Iran to delaying the release of American hostages until after the 1980 election. Frustrated with the increasing difficulty of getting his research and findings published, Parry founded the investigative journal Consortium News, which continues to today.

Although Bob never became a household name, many readers will recall News stories he played a key role in bringing to public consciousness. He uncovered the "Iran-Contra scandal" where the US secretly sold weapons to Iran via Israel with profits supporting mercenary "Contras" attacking the Nicaraguan government. He uncovered Lt. Col. Oliver North secretly working at the Reagan White House to supervise support for the Contras. He exposed CIA collusion with criminals sending weapons to the Contras and receiving tons of cocaine on return flights from Colombia and Central America.

In 1988, Parry co-authored an [article](#) that documented CIA and State Department activities to misinform the public to promote the desired public policy.

Next, Parry worked with PBS Frontline to uncover the "October Surprise". That story involved Ronald Reagan's election team secretly delaying the release of American hostages held in Iran. These stories appeared in mainstream media but were ultimately swept under the carpet.

The CIA-Contra-Cocaine Connection

The story about CIA complicity with drug-dealers was especially explosive because of the impact of drugs in poor communities across the US. There was an epidemic of cheap crack cocaine flooding poor and especially African American communities.

Robert Parry originally reported the CIA-Contra-Cocaine story in the mid 1980's. Ten years later, in 1996, investigative journalist Gary Webb uncovered what happened after the cocaine arrived in the U.S.: crack cocaine had flooded poor and African American communities, especially in California. The negative consequences were huge. The San Jose Mercury News published Gary Webb's investigation as an explosive front page 3-day series titled ["Dark Alliance"](#).

The story was initially ignored by the foreign policy and media establishment. But after two months of rising attention and outrage, especially in the African American community, a counter-attack was launched in the NY Times, Washington Post and LA Times. The LA Times alone assigned 17 reporters to what one reporter dubbed the "Get Gary Webb team". They picked apart the story, picked apart Gary Webb's personal life and distorted what he wrote. The attack succeeded. The Mercury News editors published a partial "correction" which was taken to apply to the whole story. Gary Webb was demoted and then "let go". His reputation was destroyed and he ultimately committed suicide. An 2014 movie titled "Kill the Messenger", made in consultation with Gary's family and Bob Parry, depicts the events.

When the establishment media was going after Gary Webb, with the quiet encouragement of the CIA, many journalists were silent or joined the pack attack. Later, when an internal CIA investigation confirmed the veracity of Webb's research and writing, they mostly ignored it. Robert Parry was one of the few national journalists to defend Gary Webb and his reporting from beginning to end.

At the Berkeley tribute, journalist Dennis Bernstein recalled being with Bob Parry and Gary Webb: "I remember the power that those guys had with audiences. It was easy to understand why people would be afraid of them. They were truth tellers."

The Birth of Consortium News

As other western journalists were being pressured into compliance or driven out of the profession, Robert Parry chose a different path. Together with his oldest son Sam Parry, he launched the first investigative magazine on the internet: Consortium News. In his last article Bob Parry explained, "The point of Consortium News, which I founded in 1995, was to use the new medium of the modern internet to allow the old principles of journalism to have a new home, i.e., a place to pursue important facts and giving everyone a fair shake."

For the past 23 years, Consortium News has published consistently high quality research and analysis on international issues. To give just a few examples: In March 1999, Bob Parry surveyed the dangers of the Russian economic collapse cheered on by Western neoconservatives while Mark Ames exposed the reality of Russian economic gangsters. In February 2003, Consortium News published the First Memorandum to the President by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) after Colin Powell addressed the UN Security Council. VIPS presciently warned of "catastrophic" consequences if the US attacked Iraq.

In 2005, Bob Parry exposed the bias and deception behind the rush to blame the

Syrian government after Lebanese leader Rafik Hariri was assassinated. In April 2011, as the US was pushing to overthrow Qaddafi in Libya, Parry drew parallels to the disastrous consequences of overthrowing the socialist leaning Afghan government three decades earlier.

Beginning in 2014, Bob Parry exposed the dubious accusations regarding the downing of Malaysian Airlines MH-17 in Ukraine. Over the past two years, Bob Parry wrote and edited dozens of articles exposing the bias and lack of evidence behind "Russia-gate". A few examples can be seen here.

Commitment to Facts and Objectivity

Sam and several other speakers at the Berkeley Tribute noted that Robert Parry was not ideological. He believed in following the leads and facts wherever they led. The new editor of Consortium News, Joe Lauria, said, "Bob was not a lefty radical... He didn't start out from an ideological position or have a preconceived notion of what the story should be."

Bob Parry's investigations in the 1980's revealed the U.S. administration plans and propaganda aiming to "glue black hats" on the Nicaraguan government and "white hats" on the Contra opposition. Thus he was well prepared to critically examine the disinformation campaigns accompanying "regime change" campaigns over the past decades: from Yugoslavia to Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and others.

Under Bob Parry's leadership, Consortium News has exposed "fake News" at the highest levels. As journalist Norman Solomon said at the tribute, "It's important to remember that the most dangerous fake News in the last few decades has come from the likes of the front page of the New York Times and Washington Post. There are a million dead Iraqis and many dead Americans to prove it."

Challenging the New McCarthyism

In his last article, published just two weeks before his death, Parry informed Consortium News readers about his health issue. He speculated on possible contributing factors including "the unrelenting ugliness that has become Official Washington and national journalism."

Parry described the decline in journalistic standards and objectivity.

"This perversion of principles – twisting information to fit a desired conclusion – became the modus vivendi of American politics and journalism. And those of us who insisted on defending journalistic principles of skepticism and even-handedness were increasingly shunned by our colleagues, a hostility that first emerged on the Right and among neoconservatives but eventually

sucked in the progressive world as well... The demonization of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia is just the most dangerous feature of this propaganda process – and this is where the neocons and the liberal interventionists most significantly come together. The US media approach to Russia is now virtually 100 percent propaganda.”

At the Berkeley event, writer Natylie Baldwin addressed this issue,

“Robert Parry referred to the phenomena of careerism and group think. He argued that it was ruining journalism ...When our most experienced academic expert on Russia, Stephen Cohen, can hardly get an interview on CNN and cannot get an op-ed published by the New York Times or the Washington Post, but a neo-con ideologue like Michael Weiss, who has no on the ground experience or educational credentials about Russia can be hired as a commentator by CNN on the subject, it’s dangerous. When someone like Rachel Maddow, who from her past investigative reporting knows better, has allowed herself to be used as a cartoonish purveyor of anti Russia propaganda, virtually ignoring coverage of more immediate issues facing average Americans and distracting them away from confronting the Democratic Party’s failures and dishonesty, it’s dangerous.”

Baldwin elaborated on the current critical situation and need for honest and objective journalism. She said,

“Our media, like our political system, is in crisis. Indeed, these two crises reinforce each other as both our media and our political system are corrupted by money and have been largely reduced to a cheap spectacle. According to polls, large majorities of millennials have contempt for these establishment institutions. They’re open to and looking for alternatives to these broken systems. This makes Robert Parry’s legacy and the space for genuine investigative journalism that he fostered at Consortium News more important than ever.”

Reflections on Bob Parry

The event began with messages of respect and appreciation by Alicia Jrapko of ResumenLatinoAmericano and Ann Garrison of Black Agenda Report. Ann Wright, former US Army Colonel and State Dept official, sent a video message hailing Bob Parry as one of the “truth-tellers”.

Following are excerpts from major presentations at the event.



Dennis Bernstein, Executive Producer of Flashpoints Radio, gave the first presentation. Dennis talked about his experience teaching journalism to high school students in the Bronx in 1984. The importance of investigative

journalism was underscored as Dennis' students investigated the police killing of a 67 year old grandmother named Eleanor Bumpers.

"Bob Parry was investigating Iran Contra and we were investigating the police in the South Bronx. Because those kids were so dogged with their cameras and with their questions, their investigation led led to one of the only indictments of a police officer for manslaughter in the history of the city. It was their investigation that counteracted the big lie of the press."

Dennis later worked as a reporter for *Newsday* covering the trial in Tucson Arizona of nuns in the sanctuary movement. There was a 'crazy colonel' from the White House, Oliver North, who was screaming the that nuns were getting in the way of national security and US foreign policy in El Salvador. "We were hearing a story about how this Oliver North was in fact part of this prosecution of these nuns and priests and church workers... they were all convicted."

"There was a meeting in Washington DC towards the end of 1985 ... That's where I met Robert Parry....I began to follow the work of Robert Parry. I began to understand what it took to be a thorough journalist."

"Robert Parry was very special and you know, he rarely rejected pieces that I did, but when he did it was because he felt something wasn't true in the piece. He worked very hard to explain it to me or try and rewrite the piece to save the piece, but he was incredibly patient, incredibly focused..And he was very funny. One Halloween he dressed up as the ghost of William Casey. You all

remember William Casey? Yeah. Well, that story. Iran Contra, the US government engaged in cocaine operations. The idea that the US government could be, at least in part, responsible for the flood of horrific drugs into communities across the country. Later on, I had an incredible chance to be with Gary Webb, Robert Parry and Pete Brewton, who broke the story about how the CIA was using S&Ls after they were deregulated to fund all kinds of illegal operations.”

“I have a distinct memory of Bob trying to explain to Gary Webb who was riding high on breaking the Dark Alliance stories. He was convinced he had the full support of the leadership of the San Jose Mercury News. I remember Bob trying to caution Gary about how dangerous the story was and what could happen. Gary said he knew his editors were with him and that he had strong support. They were all cheering for Gary until the New York Times and Washington Post shredded him. Bob tried to warn him, tried to tell him.

But to be with them ... I remember the power that those guys – Bob, Gary Webb and Pete Brewton – had with audiences. It was easy to understand why people would be afraid of them. They were truth tellers. They were under attack then and they’re under attack now. I am really troubled. I can’t tell you how much I miss Bob.”

“We lost them. We miss them. But Consortium News because of its power and as a tribute to Bob is continuing.

Thanks to its wonderful new editor, Joe Lauria, it continues. He’s beginning to transform it. He’s making his changes. He’s expanding it. Best part, he is bringing in some wonderful new writers that really enhance the work there. So I miss Bob, I miss him every day, but Consortium News continues and continues stronger than ever.”

Sam Parry, oldest son of Robert Parry, flew in from the east coast to attend and

speaking at the event.



"Thanks very much. I'm so honored to be here and I feel the weight of sort of this incredible crowd and the weight of my father here and the legacy that he created with Consortium News. I'm just so grateful to have you all here and to be part of this event and to do my part, to represent the family, to represent dad here. I know dad was a very humble man in many ways. He never wanted the limelight or the attention shown too brightly on him. He wanted the work to speak for itself, so I know part of him would be a little embarrassed by this great turnout, but another part of him, I know he's smiling. I can feel the smile on his face right now as I look out onto you all. So thank you all very much for coming out and thank you."

Dad chose a very difficult profession. Journalism is hard work. You're fighting to get the stories. You're fighting to get the truth. You have to write it down, you have to edit it, you have to make sure you're correct all the time. Dad always felt that he couldn't make a single mistake because if he did, they'd come after him even harder. So he worked really hard to get it all right. And he took a difficult path with his profession. He took on the mainstream as so many of you all have done with your careers as well, but he took on the mainstream. He was part of the mainstream and then he sort of had to confront them and fight for all the stories that he was able to bring forward.

And in doing so, he made himself sort of a target of, of retribution and attacks. And so he was attacked all the time. Every day by big, powerful institutions and big powerful people. He took it, but he took it because he had a community of supporters and like minded individuals, people who

understood the importance of telling the truth and speaking truth to power and that community of people are people just like you. You were his community, you were his, in many ways, his family, like minded travelers in this world.

I especially want to thank you all for being supporters of his, of his website, Consortium News.com and for coming out today, and this is just so beautiful."

Sam described the early years of Consortium News. It began as a print publication: hand collated, stamped and mailed. At college Sam had learned about the burgeoning new "internet". When Bob discovered original documents proving the October surprise, Sam suggested they could scan the documents and post them for people to see online. Bob responded, "That's an interesting idea"... and thus was born the online Consortium News.

"We didn't know what the heck we were doing in a lot of ways! We had dad's great journalism of course, but the rest of it we had to figure out as we went along.... Dad worked at this website for the next 23 years. Every single day he was tinkering away at it. He was gathering stories from many of you here in the room, and editing the stories, working with contributors to keep our truth alive. He felt so passionately about that..."

Something I wanted to share today is that dad was a patriot. I think that he really loved America. He loved our ideals, he loved the people, he loved the idea of holding the institutions that govern us accountable. Right? And that was his passion. That was what he was all about and that's what really drove him and propelled him through his life.

We're going to see a video of his life and hopefully you all will enjoy this and maybe it'll bring him to life a little bit more for you all. Thank you for being here." [This 10 minute video can be seen at 1:03:00 of the April Memorial Service [video](#).]

Natylie Baldwin is a Consortium News contributor and co-author of the book "[Ukraine: Zbig's Grand Chessboard: How the West was Checkmated](#)". She said,

"I'd like to thank everyone for coming out today. I'd like to thank the organizers for inviting me to speak at a tribute to a man who was very inspirational to me. My own interest in foreign affairs began in college not long after I graduated, 9-11 happened. I joined the local peace movement to oppose our wars and it didn't take long for me to realize that the media is a big part of the problem.



"The Myth we're taught is that our democracy is underpinned by a media that serves as a watchdog on the government and other powerful institutions, a noble fourth estate. But when it comes to issues of war and the media, rarely if ever has the media served as a questioner of government claims, performing due diligence on a matter of life, death and destruction of societies. We saw the mainstream media's gross negligence with Iraq, Libya, and other examples stretching much further back.

"We are now seeing the same thing happened with the world's other nuclear superpower, Russia. I grew increasingly concerned about the degree of recklessness by US political elites who supported the coup in Kiev, completely disregarding Russia's security interests on its border.

"I began to dig deeper into post-Soviet Russia and US- Russia relations. I realized just how distorted and lacking in context the narrative Americans were being given, was during this time. One of the sources I relied on among others was Robert Parry and Consortium News. I also connected up with Sharon Tennyson, an independent writer and program coordinator with over three decades of experience on the ground all over Russia, including citizen to citizen diplomacy during Cold War One. She became my mentor and we traveled to

Russia in October of 2015 for two weeks where I was able to speak to a cross section of Russians in several different cities on a range of issues.

"We traveled to Crimea where I interviewed a range of Crimeans about what happened in late 2013 in early 2014. At this point, I had researched and co-authored a book about the Ukraine crisis providing historical and contextual background of US-Russia relations as well as writing articles for a couple of alternative outlets.

"I tried submitting articles about my on-the-ground observations and interviews in Crimea to several other alternative outlets in the hopes of getting this information out to a wider audience. After all, not many American writers had actually been to Crimea and could provide on-the-ground perspectives.

"I was having little luck. Somehow I got hold of Robert Parry's email address and submitted it to him. Within 48 hours my article was posted with many others to follow. I was even more pleasantly surprised when a couple of weeks later I received a check in the mail for my work. That is a big deal for independent writers these days.

"The money I earned from my articles for Consortium helped finance a return trip to Russia in 2017 and more articles. Bob said that journalism required the acknowledgement that there were usually two sides and possibly more to every story and that Americans needed to hear both sides. It's critical to have an informed citizenry with a reasonable understanding of issues in a democracy. This is especially true with issues that most average Americans don't have practical experience with, such as international policies relating to other countries. In order to conduct a rational foreign policy, one must understand the other country's point of view. It doesn't mean one must agree with it, but we must know how the other side perceives its own interests so that we can determine what they may be willing to risk or sacrifice on behalf of those perceived interests. Further, it's essential to determine areas of common interest in cooperation.

"Our media, like our political system, is in crisis. Indeed, these two crises reinforce each other as both our media and our political system are corrupted by money and have been largely reduced to a cheap spectacle. According to polls, large majorities of millennials have contempt for these establishment institutions. They're open to and looking for alternatives to these broken systems. This makes Robert Parry's legacy and the space for genuine investigative journalism that he fostered at Consortium News more important than ever with strong leadership and a continued quality of long form journalism from its current and new contributors, we can make a much needed

difference at this critical time. Thank you."



Joe Lauria has been a contributing writer to Consortium News for many years. He was recently hired to become the site's new Editor-in-Chief. He spoke about the legacy of Bob Parry and his plans to continue and expand Consortium News.

"Bob was not a lefty radical.... He was just reporting the facts and where they lead. ... He didn't start off from an ideological position. He didn't have a preconceived notion of what the story should be."

"This is an age of narcissism, not only in the White House, but across the social media landscape. Self promotion is widespread in media. But that was not what Bob Parry was about. He was obsessed, but not with himself whatsoever, but with the story and getting the facts out and holding government accountable...In one C-Span interview he says that that when you hold government to account, it's misunderstood as anti-Americanism. I think he was very pro American as Sam pointed out... He was a patriot because he believed in the people of this country, not the government, and believed in holding them to account."

"I was covering the lead up to the invasion of Iraq at the UN Security Council. I was just reporting the facts and the facts were that even US allies such as France and Germany joined with Russia and China to block the resolution that the US administration, George W Bush's administration, was seeking. They had made up their minds to invade anyway. They were going through the motions at the Security Council, seeing if they can get this resolution and if they couldn't, they were going to do it anyway."

So I wrote these stories for a Canadian chain which was called Southam News. They published the Montreal Gazette, Ottawa citizen, Calgary Herald and Vancouver Sun. I had been writing for them for since 1999. But I got a call

one day from the foreign editor of this chain and he told me that his son was a Marine, a Canadian Marine, and that I had to support the war and that my reporting was not supporting the war. I said to him I'm sure you are proud of your son, but that's not my job. My job is to report what's going on about the opposition to this resolution. They never got the resolution, but they got their war.

"Bob was a skeptic, but not a cynic. And there's a big difference there. And you know, he really believed in a nonpartisan principled approach to journalism. And we're living in such a partisan age right now, and you could feel it in the air in Washington where I'm now living, and he had no time for that.

Even if you're an American citizen, when you become a reporter, you're not reporting as an American citizen, you're a reporter and all countries in a complex international crisis need to be equally reported on to let the reader know what each country's interests are, because it is interests that motivate governments when nations clash.

That's tremendous drama for journalism to report on. But instead of letting the reader understand the complexities of these situations the established media say one side is right and portray all the sides as the enemy. It became clear to me that when I worked at the Wall Street Journal that the corporate media does not have this objective view of international reporting. They're promoting an American agenda abroad. That is not journalism. That's not their job, and when you do that, when you suppress the voices of Iranians and Palestinians and Russians and North Koreans, you are dehumanizing these people and that makes it easier to go to war against them.

The American public doesn't get to understand or know anything about Palestinians as people who were just slaughtered at the gates of Gaza.

Bob Parry knew that and he got slammed for that. But we're all very thankful that he started Consortium News because he understood the power of the press is distinct from the power of government.

Too many reporters live vicariously through the power of government. They want that kind of power. So they suck up to it. They want access of course, but they sort of identify with the powerful rather than what the people. They're supposed to be the filter between the government and the people. Bob Understood that there's three parties here, there's government, there's the press and there's the public and we're supposed to be in the middle protecting the public from the lies of government. We are not seeing that now, but this is what I'm committed to try to continue doing at Consortium News.

I was asked to talk about the future of Consortium News. So I've been there six weeks now and it's an enormous responsibility. I am extremely grateful to the board for hiring me, to have faith in me to do this job. I'm well aware that it's impossible to try to do it as Parry did. I'm not trying to do that. I'm doing what I can do.

I've changed the appearance here or there to spruce it up, as Dennis said, and also to have more diverse voices in the paper. For example, Margaret Kimberly of Black Agenda Report wrote a wonderful piece for us on the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination. I'm looking to get correspondents in various countries around the world. We need Middle Eastern Arabs to write about their countries. I want more people from around the world writing about their own countries in their own voices. We have recently published Asad Abu Khalil – the Lebanese "Angry Arab" blogger who knows the region extremely well, better than almost any Western analyst could. So those are the kinds of voices I'm trying to bring.

I'm trying to revive a field of reporting that was very well established for decades in the United States and that has disappeared and that is labor reporting. I understand the unions have shrunk but even where unions don't exist, workers exist. So we're going to cover workers and the issues that they're facing. I'm looking for more stories on the struggles of women in Africa, the Middle East and India and how they are struggling for their rights.

I just want to thank everybody for being here today. Thank you.



Norman Solomon is a well-known author and journalist. He spoke of his experience

with Bob and his legacy.

"Hearing the discussion a few minutes ago about fake news, it's so important to remember that the most dangerous fake news in the last few decades resulted in a million or more dead Iraqis and many dead Americans. The most dangerous fake news has come from the likes of the front page of The New York Times and the Washington Post. That's just a reality. It's not about ideology or rhetoric it is just cold, hard life and death fact.

Bob was somebody who had not only the curiosity that was constant to try to find out more, but also a tremendous work ethic. It was just part of who he was. I had the very good fortune to work with him on a series of articles about Colin Powell. Bob and I worked on a series of articles that are still archived on Consortium, about Powell. The more we looked into it, the more we saw the tremendous gap between the positive coverage and that from the beginning of his career in Vietnam, Powell always took that expedient path, the expedient way of getting along to get along with the powerful who could give him promotions. In working with Bob, a couple of aspects have always stayed with me very strongly. One is that he would frequently say as we were trying to go through material, that I have to master the information. I have to master the material....He was very insistent. You know, it's sort of like you don't pull it out of the oven before it's baked. We can't rush these stories. We've got to know that it's nailed down and solid and we've really dug. And the other aspect I remember is how generous he was on a professional basis. In this multipart series that we did, Bob ended up doing the vast amount of the work but he insisted my name by on every article byline. Sad to say that's not that common.

Bob was not about his name in lights. It was about, "Let's get the work done."

Norman described how Bob was aware of the areas that mainstream journalists shouldn't touch, but he went there regardless.

"Almost all mainline journalists obey that unspoken directive that is accepted, internalized: Don't go there. And Bob went there and he

went there again and again. As his book "Fooling America" points out, he had to go to speak, pay a price. I remember him telling me a number of years ago when he was hammering on the Israeli role in US foreign policy and then writing about Russia, one of his colleagues, top colleagues, somebody who was in the press corps in DC who was a high editor at that point at the New York Times, said to him, 'Bob, you're losing credibility. You keep this up. You're going to marginalize yourself.' But Bob had crossed that Rubicon a long time earlier.

Norman spoke of previous fearless American journalists like George Seldes and IF Stone.

Bob Parry exemplified the attitude of: show me. I'm not going to assume that this is truthful because I might have a favorable view of this government or might assume that because other journalists are reporting it, it is received wisdom, I'm not going to take any of that on faith. If you want to go on faith, go to a house of worship.

One day toward the end of December I looked at Consortium News and saw that Bob had suffered a stroke. Then, a number of days later, there was an article by Bob. As I read it, there was a tremendous wave of feeling that it was, what's the French word, a *cri de coeur*. I later learned how extremely difficult it was just physiologically for Bob to write it.

It's one of the greatest articles about journalism I have ever read. My friend and often collaborator on articles, Jeff Cohen, said to me 'That article by Bob Parry should be assigned and read by every journalism student in America.' It's about independent journalism. It's about the herd mentality that has gotten to so many journalists in this country. Pseudo journalists, supposedly journalists, and editors run with the crowd and independent journalism is the opposite of running with the crowd. It's about holding that lantern high and saying, we have work to do and let's do it together. Thank you."

At the end of the event, participants purchased copies of Robert Parry's books "Fooling America" (1992), "Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, The Press & Project Truth" (1999), and "America's Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes to Barack Obama" (2012).

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